

# ***Cher Ami*** And The ***Lost Battalion***



***The Brave Little Bird  
That saved 200 Soldiers' Lives***

A HomeOfHeroes Coloring Book

# ***Cher Ami***

A n d

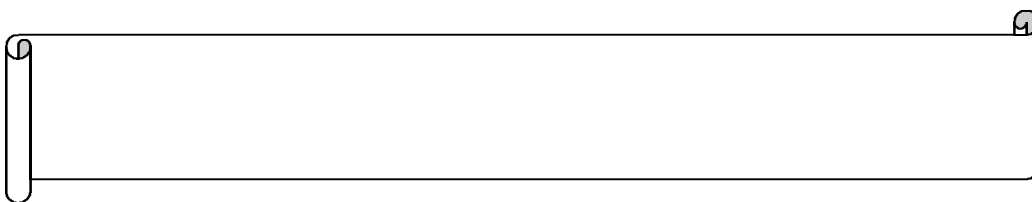
# **The Lost Battalion**

O f W o r l d W a r I



*THE BRAVE LITTLE PIGEON THAT SAVED 200 LIVES!*  
BY DOUG & PAM STERNER

A Coloring Book for Kids \* Based on a True Story



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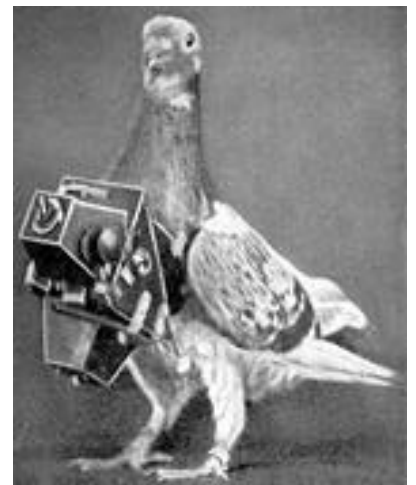
# ***Cher Ami***

## *(Dear Friend)*

The ability to communicate is essential to soldiers in the field. Without communications to their commanders or support units in the rear area, soldiers on the front line can't send messages about their progress, request needed supplies, or call for help when things reach their worst.

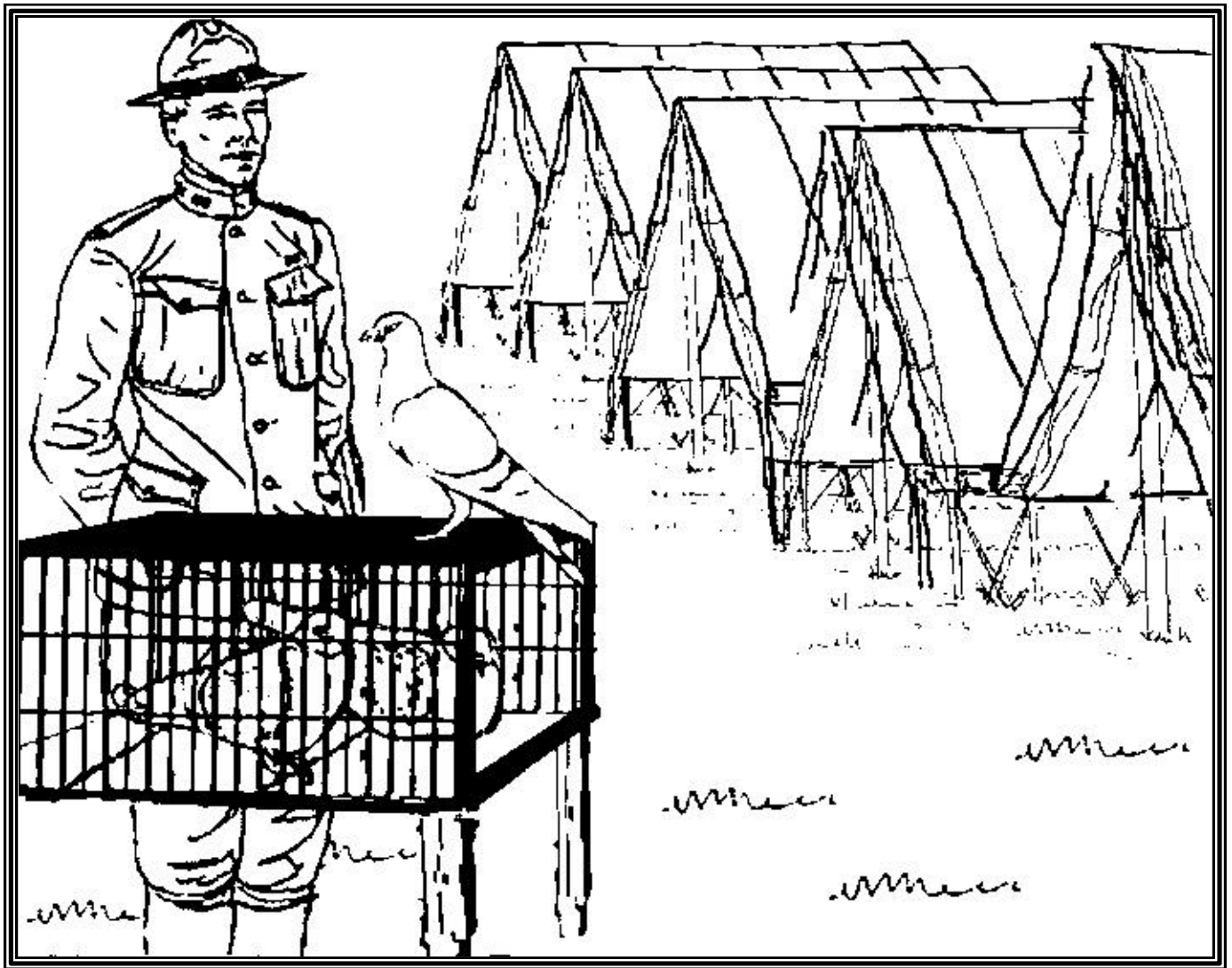
During World War I, messages were sometimes transmitted by wire (telegraph or field phone), but two-way radio communications had not yet become available. Sometimes a unit was ordered to attack over a broad and often difficult terrain, making it impossible to string the wire necessary for communications. In these situations, a field commander often carried with him several carrier pigeons.

Pigeons served many purposes during the war, racing through the skies with airplanes, or even being fitted with cameras to take pictures of enemy positions. One of the most important roles they served in was as messengers. An important message could be written on a piece of paper, then that paper neatly folded and secured in a small canister attached to a pigeon's leg. Once the pigeon was released, it would try to fly to its home back behind the lines, where the message would be read and transmitted to the proper military planners.





**THE ARMY IS DIVIDED AMONG SEVERAL DIFFERENT SPECIALTIES AND THE MEN FROM EACH SPECIALTY ARE TRAINED FOR A PARTICULAR KIND OF WORK. INFANTRYMEN ARE TRAINED TO FIGHT ON THE GROUND, ARTILLERYMEN ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BIG GUNS, ARMOR REFERS TO THE MEN WHO FIGHT IN TANKS, AND THE AIR SERVICE WAS THE NAME FOR THE GROUP OF SOLDIERS WHO FLEW AIRPLANES WORLD WAR I. ONE OF THE OLDEST OF THESE GROUPS OF SOLDIERS IS THE U.S. ARMY SIGNAL CORPS. THESE MEN ARE THE ONES RESPONSIBLE FOR INSURING THAT MESSAGES BETWEEN ALL UNITS GET THROUGH TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE. THE ARMY SIGNAL CORPS IDENTIFIES ITSELF BY A TORCH WITH TWO CROSSED FLAGS. THESE REPRESENT SIGNAL FLAGS, A COMMON WAY THAT MESSAGES WERE PASSED USING CODE.**



**WHEN THE UNITED STATES ENTERED WORLD WAR I IN 1917, THE ARMY SIGNAL CORPS WAS GIVEN 600 PIGEONS FOR THE PURPOSE OF PASSING MESSAGES WHEN SIGNAL FLAGS OR A FIELD PHONE COULDN'T DO IT. THE PIGEONS WERE DONATED BY BIRD BREEDERS IN GREAT BRITAIN, AND THEN WERE TRAINED BY AMERICAN SOLDIERS.**

During the Meuse -Argonne Offensive, the 2 -month battle that finally ended World War I, 442 pigeons were used in the area of Verdun in France to carry hundreds of messages. This is how the system worked:

When a commander in the field needed to send a message, he first wrote it out on paper, trying to be both brief and yet as detailed as possible. Then he called for one of his Signal Corps officers, who would bring one of the pigeons that went with the soldiers into battle. The message would be put in the capsule on the bird's leg, and then the bird would be tossed high in the air to fly home.

The carrier pigeon would fly back to his home coop behind the lines. When he landed, the wires in the coop would sound a bell or buzzer, and another soldier of the Signal Corps would know a message had arrived. He would go to the coop, remove the message from the canister, and then send it by telegraph, field phone or personal messenger, to the right persons.

Carrier pigeons did an important job. It was also very dangerous. If the enemy soldiers were nearby when a pigeon was released, they knew that the bird would be carrying important messages, and tried their best to shoot the pigeon down so the message couldn't be delivered.

Some of these pigeons became quite famous among the infantrymen they worked for. One pigeon named "The Mocker", flew 52 missions before he was wounded. Another was named "President Wilson". He was injured in the last week of the war and it seemed impossible for him to reach his destination. Though he lost his foot, the message got through and saved a large group of surrounded American infantrymen.

**CHARLES WHITTLESEY**  
WAS A LAWYER IN NEW YORK,  
BUT WHEN THE UNITED STATES  
SENT OUT A CALL FOR  
SOLDIERS TO HELP FRANCE  
FIGHT FOR ITS FREEDOM, MR.  
WHITTLESEY JOINED THE  
ARMY AND WENT TO EUROPE  
TO HELP.

HE WAS MADE THE  
COMMANDER OF A BATTALION  
OF SOLDIERS IN THE 77TH  
INFANTRY DIVISION, KNOWN  
AS "THE LIBERTY DIVISION"  
BECAUSE MOST OF THE MEN  
CAME FROM NEW YORK AND  
WORE A BRIGHT BLUE PATCH  
ON THEIR SHOULDERS THAT  
HAD ON IT THE

**STATUE OF LIBERTY.**



**ON OCTOBER 2, 1918, MAJOR WHITTLESEY LED MORE THAN 500 MEN IN AN ATTACK THAT BROKE THROUGH THE ENEMY LINES. MAJOR WHITTLESEY HAD HIS MEN SET UP DEFENSIVE POSITIONS IN A POCKET IN THE DENSE ARGONNE FOREST, JUST ABOVE A SMALL CREEK THAT HAD BEEN THEIR OBJECTIVE. HE DIDN'T KNOW THAT HIS BATTALION WAS THE ONLY ONE THAT HAD BROKEN THROUGH THE LINES. THAT NIGHT ENEMY SOLDIERS CREPT IN AND SURROUNDED THE POCKET. ALL ALONE, AHEAD OF ALL THE OTHER FRIENDLY UNITS, MAJOR WHITTLESEY'S BATTALION WAS ALONE, SURROUNDED, AND ALREADY RUNNING LOW ON FOOD, AMMUNITION, AND EVEN SOLDIERS JUST FROM THE FIGHT TO GET INTO THE ARGONNE FOREST.**



**TWO DAYS LATER AMERICAN ARTILLERY MEN TRIED TO SEND SOME PROTECTION. THE BIG GUNS FIRED HUNDREDS SHELLS INTO THE RAVINE WHERE THE GERMANS HAD SURROUNDED MAJOR WHITTLESEY. THE GERMANS WERE NOW ATTACKING THE LOST BATTALION WITH MACHINEGUNS, RIFLES AND GRENADES. UNFORTUNATELY, THE AMERICAN COMMANDERS DIDN'T KNOW EXACTLY WHERE THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS WERE, AND STARTED DROPPING THE BIG SHELLS RIGHT ON TOP OF THEM. IT WAS A HORRIBLE SITUATION THAT MIGHT HAVE RESULTED IN MAJOR WHITTLESEY AND ALL HIS MEN GETTING KILLED—KILLED BY THEIR OWN ARMY, NO LESS.**

## *Cher Ami*

The most famous of the World War I carrier pigeons was named Cher Ami, French words meaning "Dear Friend". Cher Ami spent several months on the front lines. In the fall of 1918 he flew 12 important missions to deliver messages. Perhaps the most important was the message he carried on October 4, 1918.

When his men were being shelled on October 4th, Major Whittlesey called for his last pigeon, Cher Ami. He wrote a quick and simple note, telling the men who directed the artillery guns where his battalion was located and asked them to stop. The note that was put in the canister on Cher Ami's left leg simply said:

*"We are along the road parallel to 276.4.  
"Our own artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us.  
"For heaven's sake, stop it."*

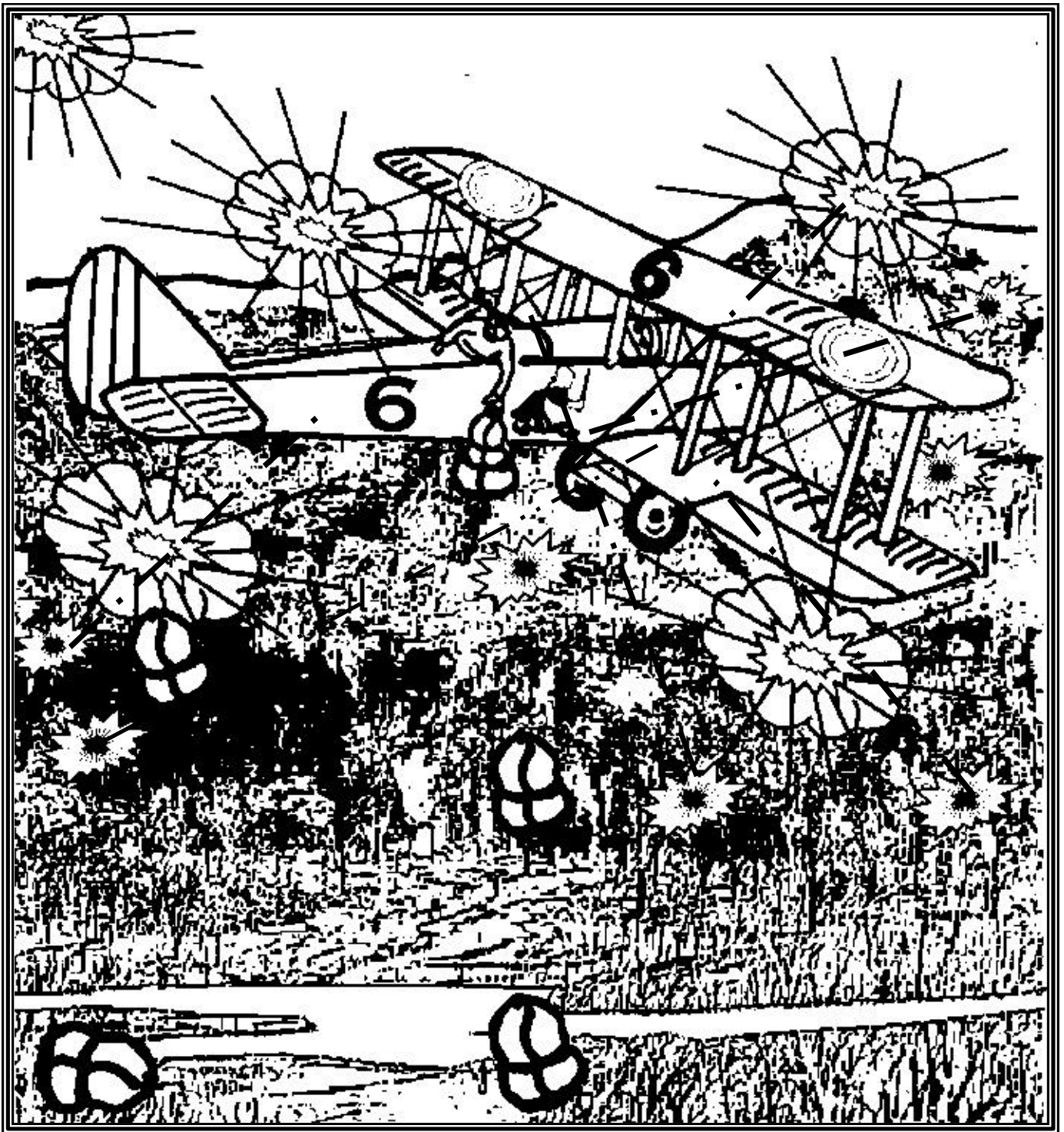
As Cher Ami tried to fly back home, the Germans saw him rising out of the brush and opened fire. For several minutes, bullets zipped through the air all around him. It looked at first like the little pigeon was going to fall, that he wasn't going to make it. The doomed American infantrymen were crushed; their last hope was plummeting to earth against a very heavy attack from German bullets.

Somehow Cher Ami managed to spread his wings and start climbing again, higher and higher, beyond the range of the enemy guns. He flew 25 miles in only 25 minutes to deliver his message. A short time later the shelling stopped. More than 200 American lives were saved...all because the little bird wouldn't quit trying.





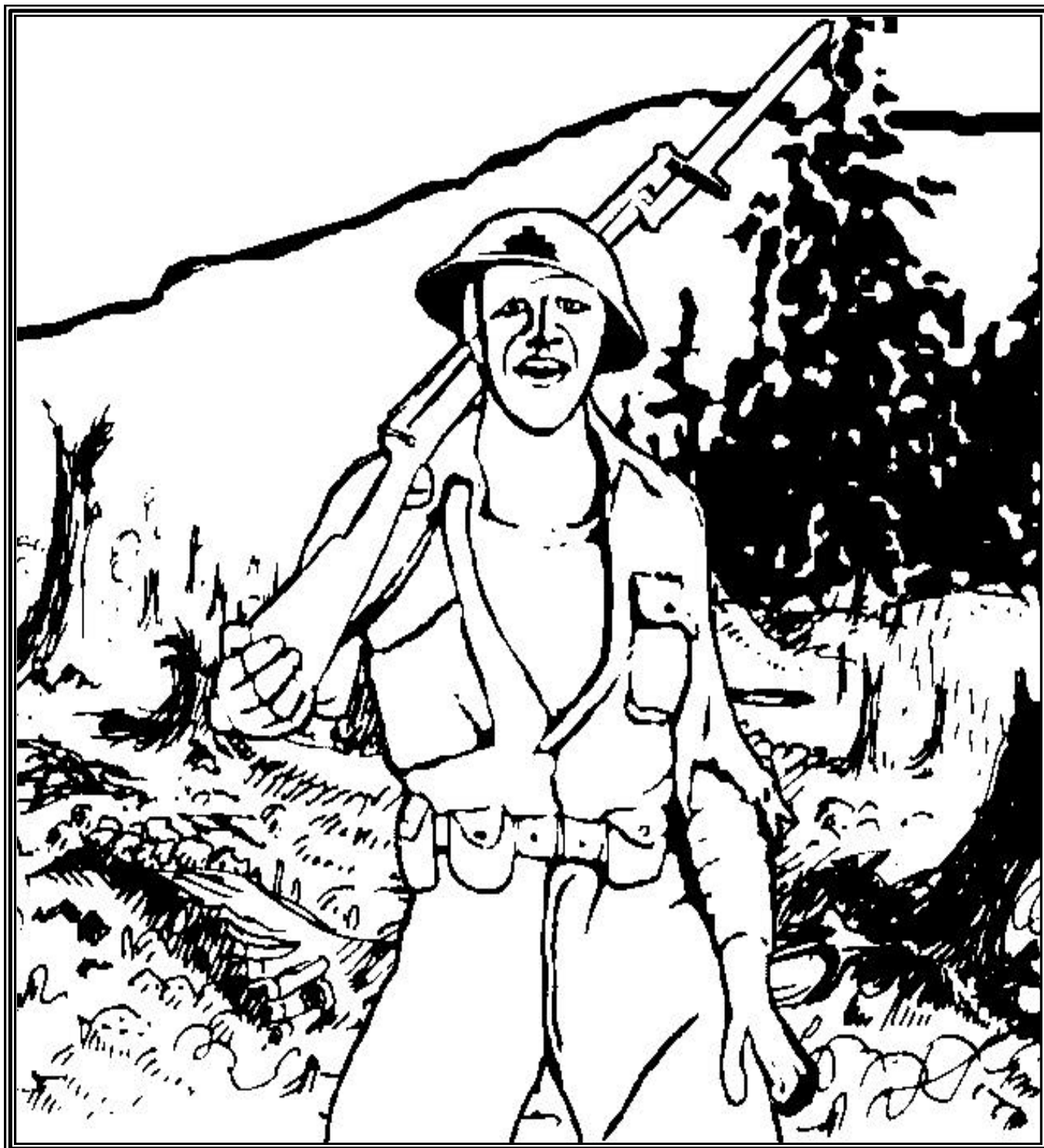
ON HIS LAST MISSION, *CHER AMI* WAS BADLY WOUNDED. WHEN HE FINALLY REACHED HIS COOP, HE COULD FLY NO LONGER. THE SOLDIER THAT ANSWERED THE SOUND OF THE BELL FOUND THE LITTLE BIRD LYING ON HIS BACK, COVERED IN BLOOD. HE HAD BEEN BLINDED IN ONE EYE, AND A BULLET HAD HIT HIS BREASTBONE, MAKING A HOLE THE SIZE OF A QUARTER. FROM THAT AWFUL HOLE, HANGING BY JUST A FEW TENDONS, WAS THE ALMOST SEVERED LEG OF THE BRAVE LITTLE BIRD. ATTACHED TO THAT LEG WAS A SILVER CANISTER, WITH THE ALL-IMPORTANT MESSAGE. ONCE AGAIN, *CHER AMI* WOULDN'T QUIT UNTIL HE HAD FINISHED HIS JOB.



MAJOR WHITTLESEY'S MEN HAD GONE FOR DAYS WITHOUT FOOD, WATER, OR BANDAGES FOR THE WOUNDED. ON THE FOURTH DAY, LIEUTENANTS ERWIN BLECKLEY AND HAROLD GOETTLER FROM THE ARMY'S AIR SERVICE TRIED TO FLY OVER THE LOST BATTALION TO DROP SUPPLIES. IT WAS THE FIRST AIR DROP IN U.S. ARMY HISTORY.

DESPITE THE HEAVY ENEMY FIRE THE BRAVE AIRMEN WOULDN'T GIVE UP. THEY FLEW AS LOW AS THEY COULD TO TRY AND FIND THE LOST BATTALION. SADLY, THEIR AIRPLANE WAS SHOT DOWN. THEY DIED TRYING TO HELP THEIR FELLOW SOLDIERS.

**AFTER 5 DAYS THE LOST BATTALION WAS FOUND AND RESCUED. THE TIRED MEN WHO HADN'T EATEN FOR MORE THAN 100 HOURS, MARCHED HAPPILY OUT OF THE FOREST.**



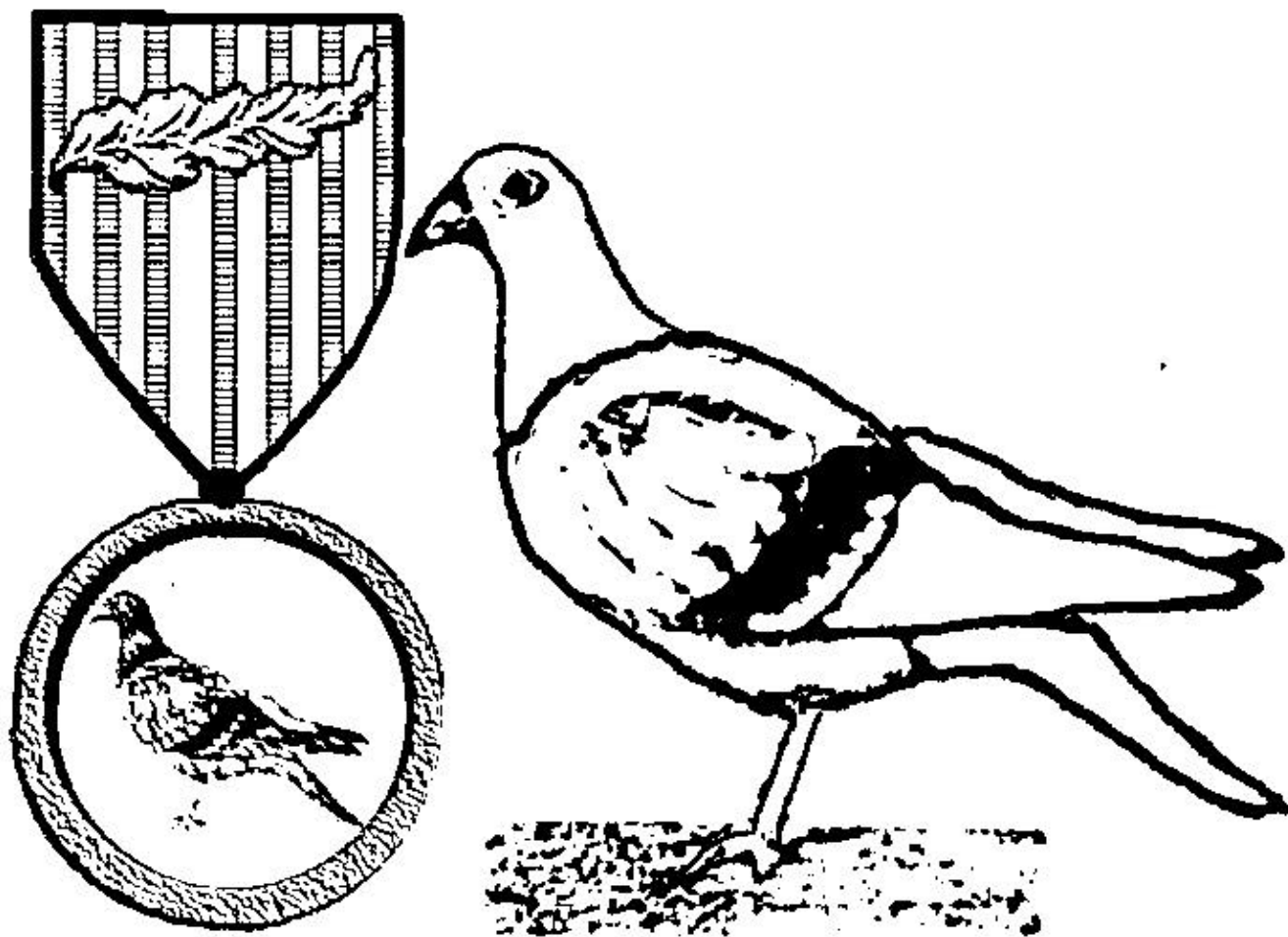
**OF THE 500 MEN WHO WENT INTO THE ARGONNE FOREST WITH MAJOR WHITTLESEY, ONLY 194 REMAINED TO MARCH OUT OF THE WOODS WITH HIM. THEY SURVIVED BECAUSE OF THE HEROISM OF THEIR LEADERS--AND BECAUSE A LITTLE BIRD NAMED *CHER AMI* HAD TAUGHT THEM NO MATTER HOW BAD THINGS GET, YOU CAN NEVER GIVE UP!**

**FOR HIS HEROIC LEADERSHIP, MAJOR WHITTLESEY WAS AWARDED THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR, THE HIGHEST AWARD THAT CAN BE GIVEN TO ANY SOLDIER. MEDALS OF HONOR WERE ALSO AWARDED TO THE OTHER TWO LEADERS OF THE LOST BATTALION, CAPTAIN GEORGE MCMURTRY AND LIEUTENANT NELSON HOLDERMAN.**



**LIEUTENANTS HAROLD GOETTLER AND ERWIN BLECKLEY, THE TWO BRAVE AIRMEN WHO DIED TRYING TO FIND THE LOST BATTALION AND DELIVER SUPPLIES TO THEM, WERE PRESENTED POSTHUMOUS MEDALS OF HONOR. THAT MEANS THAT THEIR AWARD WAS PRESENTED TO THEIR FAMILY BECAUSE THEY HAD DIED DOING THEIR HEROIC ACT.**

BUT IT WAS *CHER AMI* THAT WAS THE BIG HERO OF THE 77TH INFANTRY DIVISION. MEDICS WORKED HARD TO PATCH HIM UP. WHEN FRENCH SOLDIERS HEARD ABOUT *CHER AMI*'S BRAVERY THEY GAVE HIM ONE OF THEIR GREATEST HONORS. *CHER AMI* WAS PRESENTED A MEDAL CALLED THE FRENCH *CROIX DE GUERRE* WITH A PALM LEAF.



THOUGH THE MEDICS SAVED *CHER AMI*'S LIFE, THEY COULDN'T SAVE HIS LEG. MAJOR WHITTLESEY AND HIS MEN TOOK CARE OF THE LITTLE BIRD THAT HAD SAVED 200 OF THEIR FRIENDS AND EVEN CARVED A SMALL WOODEN LEG FOR HIM. WHEN *CHER AMI* WAS WELL ENOUGH TO TRAVEL HE WAS PUT ON A BOAT TO THE UNITED STATES. THE COMMANDER OF ALL OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY, THE GREAT GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING, PERSONALLY SAW *CHER AMI* OFF AS HE DEPARTED FRANCE.

IN THE UNITED STATES THE STORY OF *CHER AMI* WAS TOLD AGAIN AND AGAIN. THE LITTLE BIRD WAS IN THE NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES, AND EVERYONE KNEW HIS NAME. HE BECAME ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS HEROES OF WORLD WAR I. YEARS AFTER THE WAR A MAN NAMED HARRY WEBB FARRINGTON DECIDED TO PUT TOGETHER A BOOK OF POEMS AND SHORT STORIES ABOUT THE MEN AND HEROES OF WORLD WAR I. WHEN HIS BOOK WAS PUBLISHED, IT CONTAINED A SPECIAL POEM:

DEDICATED TO *CHER AMI*:



# *Cher Ami*

by Harry Webb Farrington

Cher Ami, how do you do!  
Listen, let me talk to you;  
I'll not hurt you, don't you see?  
Come a little close to me.

Little scrawny blue and white  
Messenger for men who fight,  
Tell me of the deep, red scar,  
There, just where no feathers are.

What about your poor left leg?  
Tell me, Cher Ami, I beg.  
Boys and girls are at a loss,  
How you won that Silver Cross.

"The finest fun that came to me  
Was when I went with Whittlesey;  
We marched so fast, so far ahead!  
'We all are lost,' the keeper said;

'Mon Cher Ami --that's my dear friend--  
You are the one we'll have to send;  
The whole battalion now is lost,  
And you must win at any cost.'

So with the message tied on tight;  
I flew up straight with all my might,  
Before I got up high enough,  
Those watchfull guns began to puff.

Machine-gun bullets came like rain,  
You'd think I was an aeroplane;  
And when I started to the rear,  
My! the shot was coming near!

But on I flew, straight as a bee;  
The wind could not catch up with me,  
Until I dropped out of the air,  
Into our own men's camp, so there!"

But, Cher Ami, upon my word,  
You modest, modest little bird;  
Now don't you know that you forgot?  
Tell how your breast and leg were shot.

"Oh, yes, the day we crossed the Meuse,  
I flew to Rampont with the news;  
Again the bullets came like hail,  
I thought for sure that I should fail.

The bullets buzzed by like a bee,  
So close, it almost frightened me;  
One struck the feathers of this sail,  
Another went right through my tail.

But when I got back to the rear,  
I found they hit me, here and here;  
But that is nothing, never mind;  
Old Poilu, there is nearly blind.

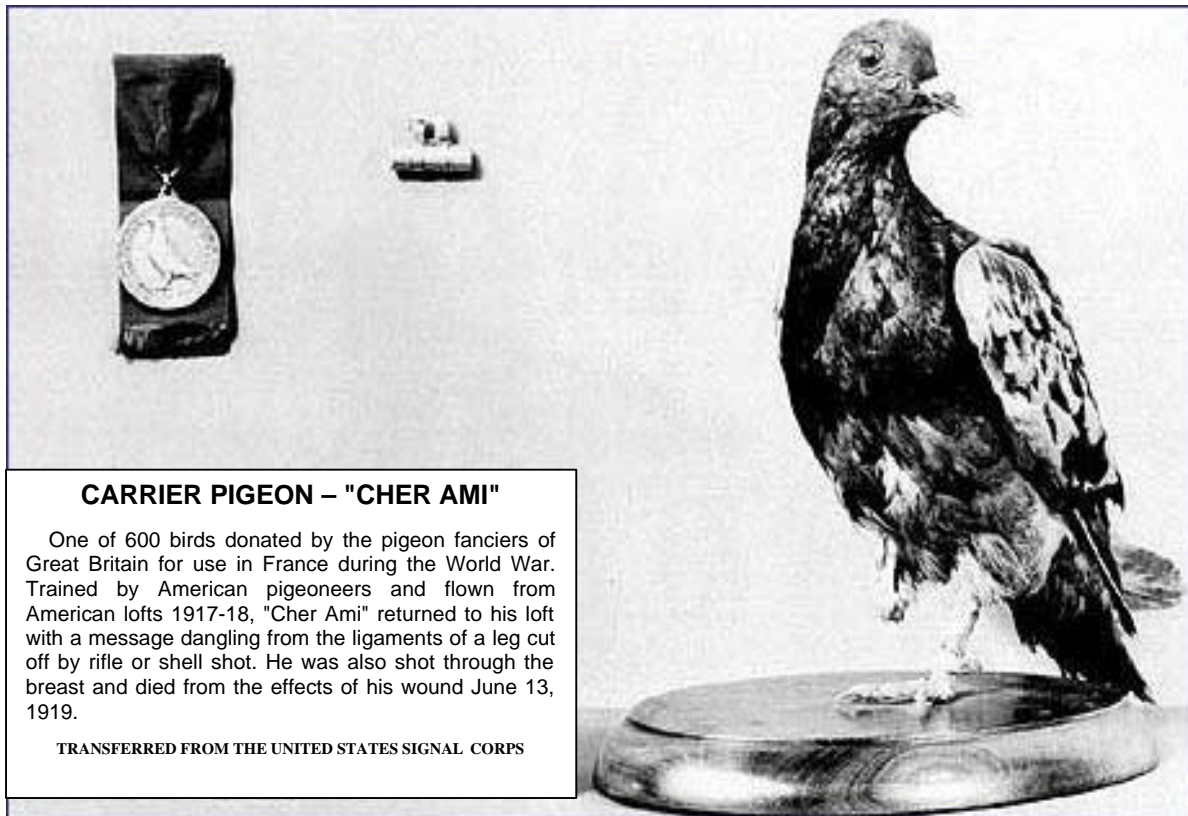
I only care for what they said,  
For when they saw the way I bled,  
And found in front a swollen lump,  
The message hanging from this stump;

The French and Mine said, 'Tres bien,'  
Or 'Very good' --American.  
'Mon Cher Ami, you brought good news;  
Our Army's gone across the Meuse!

You surely had a lucky call!  
And so I'm glad. I guess that's all.  
I'll sit, so pardon me, I beg;  
It's hard a-standing on one leg!"

"Cher Ami" and Poems From France  
Rough & Brown Press, 1920

**Cher Ami died of his multiple war wounds on June 13, 1919-- less than a year after he had completed his service to the United States Army Signal Corps. Upon his death a taxidermist preserved the small pigeon for future generations, a bird with a story that became an inspiration to millions over the years.**



**Today, visitors to the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. can still see Cher Ami, preserved for history. Alongside the French Croix de Guerre with palm that was awarded to him by the French government you can also see the small silver capsule that carried the all-important message from Major Whittlesey.**